Getting the Best from Your Clock Radio

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P. Lay

Clock radios often give atrocious reception, even when properly tuned in. This is not surprising when you consider that they usually only use a simple ferrite rod antenna. If no telescopic aerial is provided, then there is normally a half metre or so of wire poking out of the back of the radio, connected to the tuned circuit: this usually improves matters somewhat.

Unfortunately, however, it is not always enough: but a simple trick will let us improve the antenna's gain. Fit a single-pole connector to the end of the antenna wire, and to the other part of the connector attach a length of insulated hook-up wire. Using a couple of drawing pins attach the wire to the underside of the bed or the back of the wardrobe. For even more signal strength, fit instead a coaxial connector to the end of the wire and plug it into an aerial socket. It is perfectly adequate to connect only to the sheath and not to the central conductor. The connection can alternatively be made capacitively using a capacitor with a value of the order of a few pF. Indeed, soldering is not necessary: the capacitive effect makes mechanical fixing alone sufficient. If the aerial socket is near enough to the clock radio, then the hook-up wire can be dispensed with altogether and the connection made directly. This method is particularly suitable when the radio is shielded in a steel-reinforced concrete building.

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